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Child Safety Seat Co-op in New Hampshire

In 1984, 424 children between the ages of 0-4 years were killed in motor vehicle accidents.¹ Most of these tragedies are preventable through proper and consistent use of child safety seats. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that child safety seats saved the lives of 158 children aged 0-4 during 1984.²

The Hanover (New Hampshire) Consumer Cooperative Society is a well established consumer-owned business that rents child safety seats to Hanover and area residents as a community service whether or not they are a Co-op member. The rental cost to the consumer is \$.50/month; a \$7 refundable deposit is required for a Co-op member, and \$10 for a non-member; \$5 charge is deducted if the seat is returned dirty.

The program began in 1975 with five infant seats bought with a \$100 donation from a local foundation sponsored by the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center; today, 285 infant seats are available to community residents. The additional seats were purchased with seat rental money. The life of one seat is about 27 months—three-nine month rental periods—unless the seat is in a motor vehicle crash and is no longer used. Each seat would generate \$13.50, grossing \$3,847.50 for the 285 seats in program. Subtracting maintenance costs, including replacement of pads, and loss and replacement of seats (\$250), the Co-op would be able to purchase 95 seats over the next 27 months.

The maintenance of the program is not time consuming. Each parent signs a rental agreement with the Co-op, is shown how to use and install the seat correctly, and returns the seat when the child has outgrown it (at approximately

20 lbs or 9 months of age). Since New Hampshire Law requires children to be restrained up to age 5, most parents choose to purchase a toddler seat at this time. The Co-op program does not rent toddler or convertible seats but may do so at a later date.

The insurance coverage is negotiated as part of the overall comprehensive insurance plan at a reasonable cost to the Co-op. Running a loaner program provides a visible and valuable community service, requires little maintenance and bookkeeping, and virtually pays for itself. This is an excellent mechanism to involve local businesses in promoting child passenger safety.

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Is the Oklahoma Child Restraint Law Effective?

Since 1979, all states have passed legislation requiring infants and young children to be restrained when traveling in passenger cars. Evaluations of the laws report varying levels of effectiveness ranging from an 8 per cent injury reduction in California to 26 per cent in Michigan for the year following enactment of the law.^{1,2} However, differences in penalties, enforcement activities, and public education programs make it difficult to compare states. The long-term effectiveness of these laws is thus far unknown.

Since November 1, 1983, children under 4 years of age of Oklahoma residents are required either to be transported in federally approved child restraint devices or to be secured by seat belts in the rear seat of motor vehicles. In addition, children 4 and 5 years of age must be secured either by child restraint systems, or by seat belts. Police are authorized to stop and verbally warn violators, but no other penalties are stipulated in the law.³

Table 1 shows the trend data for injured passengers under 5 years of age

TABLE 1—Number of Injured Passengers by Age Group, Oklahoma, 1980-85

| Year | Age Group | | Ratio |
|-------------------------------------|-----------|------|-------|
| | 0-4 | 5-13 | |
| All Passengers* | | | |
| 1980 | 701 | 1109 | .632 |
| 1981 | 1072 | 1635 | .656 |
| 1982 | 1091 | 1772 | .616 |
| 1983 | 867 | 1629 | .532 |
| 1984 | 845 | 1667 | .507 |
| 1985** | 626 | 1325 | .472 |
| Chi square = 46.8, df = 5, p < .001 | | | |
| Front Seat Passengers | | | |
| 1980 | 522 | 616 | .847 |
| 1981 | 803 | 961 | .836 |
| 1982 | 783 | 1020 | .768 |
| 1983 | 616 | 975 | .632 |
| 1984 | 550 | 951 | .578 |
| 1985** | 397 | 749 | .530 |
| Chi square = 64.8, df = 5, p < .001 | | | |
| Rear Seat Passengers | | | |
| 1980 | 171 | 409 | .418 |
| 1981 | 257 | 607 | .423 |
| 1982 | 291 | 615 | .473 |
| 1983 | 247 | 554 | .446 |
| 1984 | 277 | 627 | .442 |
| 1985** | 208 | 476 | .437 |
| Chi square = 1.7, df = 5, p > .75 | | | |

*The total number of passengers is greater than the sum of front and rear seat passengers, since seating position was not or could not be reported for some injured occupants.

**Preliminary data, January to September 1985.

SOURCE: Oklahoma Summary of Motor Vehicle Collisions, Accidents Records Division, Oklahoma Department of Public Safety (various years).